

## Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 ORM-01 IO-10 AF-06 ARA-10 EA-09

EUR-12 NEA-10 VO-03 SCA-01 INSE-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-15 AID-05 OMB-01 EB-07 A-01 FDRE-00 TRSE-00 /135 R

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TO ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS

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INFO DOD

DCASD PHILADELPHIA

UNCLAS STATE 234233

INFORM CONSULS DCASD PHILA FOR GENERAL CANNON

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: PRESS RELEASE REGARDING REPATRIATE SHIP OPTION

FOR: SENIOR CIVILIAN COORDINATORS

1. THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT WAS RELEASED AT THE STATE  
DEPARTMENT BRIEFING 12:30 P.M. WASHINGTON TIME, TUESDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 30, 1975:

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THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED TO ACCEDE TO THE URGENT PLEAS OF REPATRIATES ON GUAM TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMELAND VIA A VIETNAMESE SHIP CURRENTLY IN THE GUAM HARBOR. THE "VIET-NAM THUONG TIN," A 487-FOOT VESSEL WHICH CARRIED VIETNAMESE SELF-EVACUEES TO GUAM, WILL BE REPAIRED, FULLY PROVISIONED AND FUELED FOR USE BY THE 1,600 VIETNAMESE WHO WISH TO SAIL IT TO THEIR COUNTRY. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE PREPARATIONS WILL REQUIRE TWO TO THREE WEEKS AND THAT THE PASSAGE FROM GUAM TO VIETNAM WILL TAKE ABOUT TWO WEEKS. WORK WILL BEGIN IMMEDIATELY TO PREPARE THE 6,275-GROSS-TON SHIP FOR THE VOYAGE.

2. THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ARE FORWARDED FOR USE AND GUIDANCE IN RESPONSE TO QUERY:

Q. THE REPATRIATES HAVE BEEN DEMONSTRATING FOR QUITE SOME TIME. WHY HASN'T THE U.S. TAKEN THIS STEP SOONER?

A. SINCE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT FOR ALL PEOPLES IS A BASIC TENET OF AMERICAN POLICY, FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW, THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES HAVE ALWAYS HAD THE FREEDOM TO OPT FOR RETURN. WE HAVE REPEATEDLY MADE THIS CLEAR TO ALL THE REFUGEES. THE PROBLEM HAS BEEN ONE OF ACCEPTANCE AT THE OTHER END.

IN APRIL, WE ASKED THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES TO UNDERTAKE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE VIETNAMESE ON BEHALF OF THOSE WHO MIGHT WISH TO RETURN. HE AGREED THAT THE TASK WAS WITHIN HIS MANDATE. THEREAFTER, IN FACT, HE WAS ASKED TO PERFORM THE SAME FUNCTION BY THE AUTHORITIES IN SAIGON. BETWEEN THEM, THEY SET UP A PROCEDURE WHEREBY THE WOULD-BE REPATRIATES FILLED OUT DETAILED QUESTIONNAIRES WHICH WERE THEN SENT TO SAIGON FOR STUDY AND INVESTIGATION. PREVIOUS REQUESTS FOR UNILATERAL ACTION ON OUR PART HAVE BEEN HELD IN ABEYANCE TO ALLOW THE PROCEDURE TO OPERATE AND THE UNHCR THE FULLEST OPPORTUNITY TO CARRY ON HIS NEGOTIATIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT FIVE MONTHS IS A REASONABLE PERIOD TO WAIT FOR A PROCESS TO PROVE ITSELF, AND WE HAVE DONE SO. ALSO, AMPLE TIME HAS ELAPSED FOR PROCESSING THE QUESTIONNAIRES WHICH THE WOULD-BE

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REPATRIATES FILLED OUT IN THE SPRING.

THOSE WHO SAIL ON THE "THUONG TIN" HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO LIVE WITH THE FRUSTRATION OF BEING SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES ANY LONGER AND THAT THEY WOULD PREFER TO TAKE THEIR CHANCES. THEY HAVE OFFERED TO SIGN INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS TO THAT EFFECT.

WE WILL ALSO ASK THE UNHCR TO ACT ON BEHALF OF ANY VIETNAMESE REFUGEE WHO MIGHT IN THE FUTURE DECIDE HE WOULD LIKE TO GO BACK RATHER THAN REMAIN SETTLED IN THE UNITED STATES.

Q. WILL THE THUONG TIN HAVE AN AMERICAN ESCORT?

A. NO ESCORT, WE WILL BE KEEPING AN EYE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE SHIP THROUGH INTERNATIONAL WATERS AND WILL BE READY TO COME TO ITS ASSISTANCE IF MECHANICAL OR OTHER DIFFICULTIES OCCUR ON BOARD THAT THE CAPTAIN AND CREW CANNOT HANDLE.

Q. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE VIETNAMESE DO NOT PERMIT THE SHIP TO DOCK?

A. THE REPATRIATES ARE CONFIDENT THAT THEY WILL BE PERMITTED TO LAND EVEN THOUGH THE VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES HAVE GIVEN NO DEFINITE INDICATION ALONG THESE LINES TO THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES.

Q. WILL THE PRESS BE ALLOWED TO GO ON BOARD, EITHER IN THE GUAM HARBOR OR ON THE TRIP?

A. VISITS TO THE SHIP WHILE IT IS IN GUAMIAN WATERS WILL BE PERMITTED AS LONG AS THEY ARE ACCEPTABLE TO THE REPATRIATES AND DO NOT INTERFERE WITH THE WORK OF MAKING IT READY.

Q. DO WE KNOW OF ANY OTHER SHIPS THAT HAVE GONE BACK TO VIETNAM FROM OTHER PLACES?

A. YES, TWO. ONE SAILED FROM THAILAND, THE OTHER FROM

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MALAYSIA, BOTH IN AUGUST. ALL WE KNOW IS THAT THEY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO LAND.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO DON'T WANT TO GO ON THE SHIP BUT STILL WANT TO RETURN TO VIETNAM? WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM?

A. AS YOU KNOW, SOME OF THEM ARE ALREADY SETTLED IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES. THE REST WILL NOW BE PROCESSED IN THE SAME WAY. THE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES WILL BE ASKED TO FIND SPONSORS FOR THEM AND THEY WILL BE ABLE TO LEAD MORE NORMAL LIVES THAN IS POSSIBLE IN A REFUGEE CAMP WHILE THEY AWAIT THE OUTCOME OF THE UNHCR'S CONTINUING EFFORTS ON THEIR BEHALF. THEY WILL BE FREE TO RETURN AT ANYTIME THEY FEEL THAT THEY WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Q. SHOULD THE SHIP NOT BE PERMITTED TO DOCK AND IT RETURNS TO GUAM, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE PASSENGERS?

A. THEY WILL BE ALLOWED TO RESETTLE INTO AMERICAN COMMUNITIES AS INDICATED IN THE RESPONSE TO THE PREVIOUS QUESTION.

Q. WE SEEM TO HAVE DEALT WITH THE VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES ONLY THROUGH THE UNHCR. HAVE WE ALSO TALKED WITH THEM DIRECTLY, AND IF NOT, WHY NOT?

A. WE HAVE CAREFULLY CONSIDERED APPROACHING THE VIETNAMESE DIRECTLY BUT HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT WE WOULD SUCCEED WHERE THE EFFORTS OF UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, THE INTERNATIONALLY-RECOGNIZED AGENCY FOR SUCH MATTERS, HAS NOT PRODUCED MOVEMENT.

Q. WAS THE UNHCR INFORMED IN ADVANCE OF THIS ANNOUNCEMENT? IF SO, WHAT IS HIS REACTION?

A. IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, BEFORE THE HIGH COMMISSIONER LEFT FOR HANOI, WE EXPRESSED OUR HOPE THAT HE WOULD BE ABLE TO TAKE UP THE REPATRIATES' PLIGHT AS AN URGENT MATTER DURING HIS TRIP, NOTING THAT CONTINUED SILENCE FROM VIETNAM WOULD LEAD US TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF RESPONDING TO THE UNCLASSIFIED

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REPATRIATES' INCREASINGLY URGENT PLEAS. HIS REPRESENTATIVE ON GUAM AND HIS OFFICE IN GENEVA HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF THE DECISION THAT WAS TAKEN.

AS TO HIS REACTION, THAT IS SOMETHING THAT MIGHT MORE APPROPRIATELY COME FROM HIM. WE HAVE REASON TO HOPE, HOWEVER, THAT HE WILL CONTINUE HIS EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE VIETNAMESE WOULD-BE REPATRIATES WHO CHOOSE TO WAIT FOR OFFICIAL ACCEPTANCE, CAMBODIAN WOULD-BE REPATRIATES AND ANY REFUGEES WHO AT A LATER DATE ALSO DECIDE THEY WOULD PREFER TO RETURN TO EITHER VIETNAM OR CAMBODIA.

Q. I UNDERSTAND THAT THE GROUP OF REPATRIATES ON GUAM MET WITH A UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE. WHAT DID HE TELL THEM THAT WOULD MAKE THEM SO INSISTENT?

A. THE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM HANOI, ASKED THEM TO BE PATIENT AND TO WAIT UNTIL AT LEAST DECEMBER WHEN THE UNHCR IS EXPECTED TO VISIT SAIGON. THE WOULD-BE REPATRIATES TOLD OUR REPRESENTATIVES THAT THEY WERE NOT PREPARED TO WAIT ANY LONGER.

Q. CAN WE INFER FROM YOUR AGREEMENT TO THE USE OF THE SHIP THAT THE USG ACCEPTS VIETNAMESE CLAIMS TO THE PROPERTY?

A. NO. THE SHIP WAS A COMMERCIALLY-OWNED VIETNAMESE SHIP USED BY SELF-EVACUATED REFUGEES TO COME TO GUAM. THEREAFTER, IN ACCORDANCE WITH AMERICAN LAW, IT WAS FROZEN ALONG WITH OTHER VIETNAMESE ASSETS IN THIS COUNTRY AND COMES UNDER OUR FOREIGN ASSETS CONTROL REGULATIONS. IT IS WITHIN THE PROVINCE OF THE TREASURY DEPARTMENT TO ISSUE A LICENSE FOR ITS USE IN THE HUMANITARIAN PURPOSE WE HAVE IN MIND, AND IT HAS AGREED TO DO SO.

Q. WHO IS GOING TO MAKE THE SHIP READY?

A. THE REPATRIATES THEMSELVES, WITH THE HELP OF THE U.S. NAVY.

Q. WHO WILL SAIL THE SHIP?

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A. A SHIP'S MASTER WITH TWELVE YEARS EXPERIENCE IS AMONG THE REPATRIATES, AS ARE AT LEAST 60 ABLE-BODIED SEAMEN, ENOUGH FOR THREE CREWS. PRACTICE RUNS WILL BE SCHEDULED BEFORE THE SHIP'S DEPARTURE TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERYTHING IS IN ORDER AND THAT THE CREWS ARE FAMILIAR WITH RUNNING THE SHIP.

Q. WILL ANY AMERICANS BE ABOARD ONCE IT SAILS?

A. NO.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE WOULD-BE REPATRIATES WHO ARE STILL IN U.S. RECEPTION CENTERS?

A. THOSE IN THE RECEPTION CENTERS WHO HAVE ALREADY APPLIED TO BE REPATRIATED WILL BE OFFERED THE OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN THEIR COMPATRIOTS ON THE SHIP. WE ARE NOW DETERMINING WHETHER ANY OTHERS WHO NOW ASK TO RETURN ON THE SHIP CAN BE ACCOMMODATED. KISSINGER

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